

# CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LUNCHEON

## January 24, 2005

### STATE OF THE CITY

There's no time to talk about past achievements here in Auburn. We have so much more to do.

We are still concerned with the finances of our City and for the cities of the state of Washington. Your City Council have been the good stewards of the people's money in a time when city after city has been ending services, laying off employees and shutting down some of the less essential parts of city government.

There has been no change in the financing shortfall statewide, and we will continue to be vigilant in the budgeting process. We will expend funds when the return is greater than the cost for our citizens. We will preserve working capital wherever possible.

All hiring is being done with a requirement that there be an accompanying increase in revenue or decrease in expense to justify that position. Every position that is vacated is reviewed to ensure that replacement is necessary.

But beyond the limitation of the property tax law that brings in 1% income increase while the cost of living – which is the expense side of the equation – is running at just under 2%, there are other financial problems for our city and citizens to face.

For the last year we have been working with the State of Washington to ensure there are no more losses in income to the cities, such as the attempt to make a major tax shift through Streamlined Sales Tax that would shift sales tax income from the industrial cities that produce to those cities with higher per capita incomes whose citizens can buy more, far more, than we can afford.

With this form of Streamlined Sales Tax, the cities with higher per capita incomes spend more and, therefore, will get more sales tax. It is, simply, take from the poor and give to the rich.

The cities of the Valleys from Fife to Tukwila, account for more than 65% of all of the industrial, distribution and warehousing capacity of the Puget Sound Region. Let's be clear. Of the 200 million square feet of industrial, warehouse and distribution capacity, the Valley Cities have over 130 million square feet. The Valley Cities are the largest industrial area in the Puget Sound Region, second largest on the West Coast and fourth largest in the nation.

Just the portion of sales tax limited to the industrial, distribution and warehousing function that goes to the State of Washington each year is more than \$200 million dollars.

The Valley Cities are the economic engine for the State of Washington. Auburn alone sends more than \$26 million dollars in sales tax dollars to the State, year after year, just for those industrial activities.

Streamlined Sales Tax is a major tax shift and a taking from those that produce to those who do not. Auburn will continue to work with State government to make sure that the Economic Engine of the Region does not falter at a time when the Valley Cities provide such value to our state. A major change in tax structure, city pitted against city, is not how we pull ourselves out of the current recession.

We are concerned about the finances of the City in these troubled times for our state, but still, we have accomplished much, and we will do so again this year.

First, the people must have faith in their government, and our pledge to the people is shown through our Customer Service Culture Shift. We will work with every employee. We will work with all of our relationships within the City, with all of our citizens and with all of our businesses to make sure we provide the best customer service in the Puget Sound Region.

Finances are tight, but working together in partnership with our great citizen boards and commissions, service and faith groups, we have done much and we will do more.

Where we don't have cash we will work to find it through the City's OPM Team. That stands for Other People's Money; it is a committee of staff from all the City departments that works together to find money to do the projects that must be done and it is working.

We must leave Auburn better for those that come after us and that means we will continue the work on our Auburn Environmental Park.

Imagine a place inside a busy city with birds and fish, alongside the Interurban Trail, with walking paths and parks--a setting to learn and a place to see nature—close to your own home. We've been receiving grant money and endorsements from different groups, and we will leave a legacy for our future that will make us all proud.

We have started to plan the Les Gove Community Campus, using the old YMCA as a starting point. We are working on that plan by bringing in the neighborhoods around the park and the people of the community that use the park so that we can create a vision of what we want and then find the means to bring that vision to life.

It's not just about parks and trails. There must be a place for nature and art in all we do, from a storm water retention pond to the entrance to a community. Rather than look at penalties we will continue our work to find incentives for those who will work with our community to find beauty in every project.

We have begun working on the long-neglected Airport Master Plan to develop that enterprise center. The Plan is there, it takes only the vision to drive it forward. Again, the Airport is an enterprise center, separated by ordinance from the City's General Fund, taking no funds from the taxpayers.

Our City Council has already begun work on the Golf Course Clubhouse Plan, another enterprise center that draws no money from the General Fund, yet, like the Airport, can contribute to the economic health of the community. We will work with an advisory group to find a restaurant for the Golf Course within the budget of that separate fund.

Each year our City Council, working with the community, works with a neighborhood to determine its needs and to look at necessary improvements and how they might be funded. This year we are working with the Main Street neighborhood, not to tell them what will be done, but to ask them for their neighborhood, what should be done.

Last year we began our efforts to get the word out to Auburn of all the programs, events and activities available in this city. Today we mail it, put it in the newspaper, post it on the net, and we've created a calendar of all the activities of all City of Auburn departments, and of all the service groups, church and school groups within our city. That calendar is on paper, on line and available at all City buildings.

Still, we need to improve our Parks and Recreation Department's message to our community. We know our city parks are a treasure not available in many communities of our size, and we will be producing a series called "A Walk Through the Parks" for Channel 21 this summer showing our citizens all of our parks and talking about their histories, their stories and their futures.

Part of this program is to increase public participation in City arts, parks and area beautification, to draw our citizens into the process and allow them to become more involved, not just in the process, but by getting out and digging in the dirt, and working with the selection and placement of art projects in their neighborhoods to make what we produce more and more a part of us.

Parks and Recreation, the Arts, a unified Downtown Plan, and working on the Vision of Auburn are all a part of our effort to improve the quality of life and will take the ongoing participation of our citizens as well as their elected representatives.

We have a new problem in Auburn. It's the problem of the haves and the have-nots, and both need our assistance.

We have been working to develop a planning process for human services. We have been working hard—our Human Services Commission, our great non-profits and our faith based community—to meet the needs of our community.

The Latino Center, the churches' work in the parks, our Clean Sweep Program are all a part of the ongoing effort.

I have worked as the Chair of the South King County Human Services Forum to find solutions for our South County cities, the industrial cities—the great Valley Cities. We know there is no help from outside. We will help; we will give help and hope to those in need.

But there are other needs as well, and our upper end populations—most of them new to our city—are also at risk, but in different ways.

Past administrations and Councils have worked hard to bring in the housing this city desperately needed for more than four generations. And they did bring in the new housing.

We've gained some new residents with that new housing, but those new residents have only been here a few years and, while they live in a house, they still aren't HOME. They are not yet a part of what makes Auburn such a unique community. You see, they know the way to work – and back. They may know a store or two along that route, the location of their child's school and perhaps a church, but . . . little else.

Some know of Game Farm Park, but most don't, and they've never heard of Scootie Brown, Dykstra or Isaac Evans Parks. They've never been to Rottles, haven't heard of the Rainbow or Sunbreak or a score of other Auburn standards.

They didn't see the Santa Parade, have never been a part of Auburn Good Ol' Days or the Veteran's Day Parade—the largest sanctioned Veteran's Parade west of the Mississippi. They are not involved, they are detached. They have no sense of belonging to Auburn, and we must do all we can to bring them - - - HOME.

We know what it means to be a part of a community. Oh, there is a cost. There is a cost in time and commitment, but we can show them that the cost is so small against what we receive when we become part of this wonderful community.

There is a cost, but, oh, the rewards are so great and we must give them the opportunity to be involved, to bring in those new citizens in civic endeavors and make them a part of our community.

We need to show them the privilege of joining groups and clubs, and being allowed to help others beyond themselves and their own to see what a truly special place we have here.

This is a place that does work with government, that does build schools and roads as well, that does care for each other and believes we can work together for a better future for all of us.

We must have a plan for economic development and your City is moving forward in that direction as well. We've hired an Economic Development Manager and we have been working hard. You may have noticed some new developments that have been announced in the papers, but it is going to take a lot more work.

This organization can be proud of its leadership that has been working with the City these last few months on a strategic plan. Based on those efforts, the City was able to call for a meeting of the Auburn Area Chamber of Commerce, citizens and the Auburn Downtown Association to look at strategic efforts to bring that business we want to the places here in Auburn we want them to go. Not spread out in our neighborhoods, but in sites selected for business development, for business retention and for business growth; for, as we have learned, business pays two-thirds of all property taxes and business provides the sales tax so that our citizens' taxes need not be raised.

One of those economic strategies has been to attract business and high-density residential units in the Urban Center, and we will continue the work started last year.

Our Council remembers and our citizens remember that it was less than a decade ago when a child of Auburn, wanting a summer job, had to go outside the city to find work, for there were no jobs here. No jobs at home. No place for the next generation.

Less than a decade ago we had one of the lowest per capita incomes, the highest unemployment and all of the negative figures that go with a town in despair.

For many who have lived here that was a major part of the old Auburn, and that has changed, and we will never go back. Not to those 'good old days' when we had that high unemployment and low per capita income. We will never go back to the days when we had the highest teen-age suicide rate, we will never go back to the times when we had the smallest amount of available housing in the entire county. No, we will never go back to those good old days.

Now our future is new business, building our current businesses, and placing the businesses we want for our children and our future to work, to make sure our children and theirs are never again forced to leave home.

We finished a master development agreement with Boeing this year and we will move forward with our long time friends at Boeing.

Homes, new homes, are under construction, and those specific planned developments were a goal of the citizens of the city of Auburn for more than twenty years.

Homes for ourselves; homes our children could afford and for the children of all our new residents who bought the new house that their child, once grown, might not be able to afford; homes for our seniors so that when they left their big house they could still stay at home—in Auburn.

And speaking of homes, soon—at long last—a major retirement facility—Wesley Homes—will be here in Auburn.

Right now, at times, with all the traffic it is hard to leave Auburn, but that is not the fault of those new residents or of the remaining homes to be built. That traffic is a small drop in the bucket compared to what is coming at us every morning and every night.

It is a fact that our state highway system is broken, that SR 167 is a roadblock instead of a roadbed and that the commuters from the North Pierce County cities are using our streets, clogging our arterials as they desperately try to find some way to get to work and back.

We are committed to find the solutions region-wide to get our streets back. Your City will continue to be in every group working on solutions for traffic. Hot lanes for SR 167, expansion of SR 167 with the two additional lanes—those lanes the State knows are needed if the roadway is not to continue to be a failed system by the time the work is complete.

The work is not just in King County, the need doesn't end at a political boundary, and all the work on SR 167 must begin at the Port in Pierce County and go all the way through to I-405.

There are other traffic needs and solutions as well. We continue to work on the SR 164 Tri-Party Agreement with the State of Washington and the Muckleshoot Tribe for traffic signal synchronization, for improvements to SR 164—also known as Auburn Way South—and for the establishment of the 164A bypass.

We know re-opening our Academy Drive route for emergency services is only a stopgap measure, but that must be done now to keep our citizens safe. Politics is not worth another child's life on that road.

Another life was lost this year while we awaited the approval of funds for the under crossing at A Street by the White River. Just this last week we closed on the one remaining piece of land we needed on the river, but we must have the funds for the underpass, and we are committed to and have been supported by our federal legislators in gathering those funds.

Gathering funds. That's what we do for so many of our road projects, and we are hard at work doing just that around our city.

C Street from Highway 18 to 41<sup>st</sup> is now under construction with new lanes and a new walking trail that creates another connection to the Interurban Trail.

We are still gathering funds for M Street, the last of our freight corridor projects--our M Street under-crossing, necessary before there is any further discussion of re-opening Stampede Pass.



On the north end of our city we are watching the development of properties on the drive-in site, looking forward to those big box stores we all want; perhaps even one of my favorites, a major bookstore?

Time will tell, but however that property comes together, I Street will be completed and a new north-south corridor will stretch from 277<sup>th</sup> to Auburn Way South.

We received a million dollars through Senator Murray's efforts to add to the amount necessary to complete A Street next to the transit center past the post office on Third Street all the way to B Street next to the Valu-U-Inn at 15<sup>th</sup>, which then goes all the way to 277<sup>th</sup> at the northern limits of the city, another brand new north-south corridor for our residents. A new road connecting our Transit Station, Auburn Regional Medical Center and going on past the post office.

We have worked for years on the Post Office issue, and the time is now at hand when the construction of A Street will begin, when the entrance and the parking of the post office must change, and we hope to see remodeling of that facility soon. Will that be enough for our citizens? It could be that a newly remodeled facility with a much larger parking area on the east side, and the post office alongside a new road so that traffic from north or south could access it with ease along with the contract station on Cross Street may be enough. Our residents will tell us their needs, as we have communicated those needs to the post office.

We will work with Auburn Regional Medical Center on their development while looking for more medical opportunities in our growing medical campus.

Hand in hand comes the need for new and remodeled retail businesses and residential units in our downtown.

Planning for the future and economic development means we must look beyond a wired city as others have done to perhaps becoming a Wi-Fi city; your City Council is already looking into just that possibility.

At the same time, we are moving our emergency broadcasting capability forward so that if the power is out with a major emergency Auburn

residents will be able to hear what services are available to them and what they can do for their community over an emergency radio system.

We are working in both King and Pierce counties on annexation issues. We are working together to solve the problem of King County's continued urban development with rural infrastructure permitted in the Lea Hill annexation area.

We have done our best to communicate the needs of our community for infrastructure improvements prior to future annexations. We have made it clear that there will be no more water and sewer certificates in an area without proper infrastructure until such time as King County agrees to use Auburn standards in the annexation areas.

We must remember when working on our budget that our first mission is public safety.

Part of that answer will be to help our firefighters and police officers in this downwardly spiraling financial situation we are in to ensure the future of our Police and Fire departments and their ability to respond to a larger community. But let there be no doubt; we are committed to saving our police officers and our firefighters.

For Fire, we must also continue to work on the fire stations themselves. We have already purchased property for two sites, better suited to serve our community, and we are moving forward with plans to build replacement stations.

We will also look at working with other communities and have begun talks that may lead to some kind of regional fire authority in our future.

Public safety includes our Police Department, and your City continues its commitment to public safety by equipping and training this dedicated group of men and women. But it's not just the police that keep us safe. We have two other partners as well.

Our Police Volunteers are one of the largest such groups in the state of Washington, and they are out there every day and every night – you've seen those big blue Crown Victoria cruisers with the red light on top, watching your neighborhood and mine, working for all of us.

There is another partner. There is another group we all must count on if we are going to be safe. That is all of us. It was the commitment of the citizens of Auburn that helped our police reduce the crime rate by 20% over the last two years. It is that ongoing commitment to action that will make sure we continue to reduce those numbers. Remember, we own the 9-1-1 system. Suspicious? Call it in. Who knows your neighborhood better than you do? We can make our city, our neighborhood, our street safer if we continue to work together.

We have a wonderful group of employees working for the citizens of Auburn. They are well trained and working hard for all of us every day. You've heard me talk about them, seen my Weekly Updates about their commitment to our city, and I am proud of the opportunity to work with them every day to improve the City's service to this great community. At a time when other cities have been forced to decrease staff and cut back on service, it has been the total commitment of the employees of the City of Auburn that has earned the respect of our people. Respect has to be earned. It must be earned over and over, and we will continue to work to earn your respect.

We are a land of two nations, and we will continue to develop our partnership and agreements between the City and the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. A land of two nations—that's special by itself—and spread across two counties. How many cities can say that?

We work with many governments, and we have seen many changes this last year. In Pierce County our County Councilmember Shawn Bunney is now the President of the Pierce County Council. In King County our new King County representative through re-districting is Pete von Reichbauer. We have a new Governor in this state; Governor Gregoire was in our city yesterday at Uniquely Auburn. She was here because she comes from here. She is an Auburn success story, a graduate of Auburn High School, and an Auburn "Green Pepper," as she showed as so well.

This is a city more than 100 years old that is being 'discovered' by business and those seeking good, affordable housing and a place to work, to live and have a family.

We will complete the first new Gateway to our city this year. It will show the name of our city, but even more importantly, it will say what is so important to so many of us—simply, WELCOME.

We live in a wonderful place, and it is great because of all of the people who chose to live here. That is the central fact from which all of our decisions, all our planning, laws, resolutions and everything we do come. It revolves around that central fact that Auburn must keep its special identity—it's heart.

We cannot become just another spot on the map—a 'burb without a heart, so we must engage and bring all our new residents into the process. We must continue to work together. We must continue on together to keep that spirit to make sure it will always be our Home, to make sure we know and believe in our hearts, that Auburn, this special place of ours, our home, will always be so much—much More Than We Imagined.